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COPY NO. 18

W.M. (40) 37th CONCLUSIONS. MINUTE 5.

Confidential Annex.

(9th February, 1940.)

ASSISTANCE
TO FINLAND.

(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (40) 35th
Conclusions,
Minute 1).

THE PRIME MINISTER referred to the conclusion reached by the War Cabinet at their meeting on 7th February, that Brigadier Ling should convey to Marshal Mannerheim an indication of our intentions in regard to assistance to Finland. He enquired when Brigadier Ling would be starting.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR said that Brigadier Ling would not be leaving until Sunday.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought that, if our intentions and plans were disclosed to Marshal Mannerheim, there was a grave risk that they might be communicated, first to the Finnish Government, and then possibly to Norway and Sweden. The Germans were evidently suspicious of our intentions, and were closely watching events. They were putting out threats as to the action which they would take if we sent troops to or established air bases in Sweden. If they got to know of our plans, they might forestall us in Sweden. It might be worth while reconsidering the proposal to send Brigadier Ling to Finland.

In discussion the following arguments were advanced:-

- (a) If no communication were made to the Finns to indicate that we would be helping them before the critical moment arrived, there was a danger that they

might lose heart, and suffer defeat before we were ready. Marshal Mannerheim would be greatly encouraged if he knew that he had only to hold out for a certain length of time before considerable assistance would arrive.

- (b) It was possible that even if the Finns did not crack, if they did not know our intentions, they might consent to negotiations, or to mediation by Germany. Against this, however, the Foreign Secretary drew attention to Telegram No. 75 from Finland, in which the Prime Minister of Finland was reported as having said that no suggestion of mediation had been received, and that, if it were, it would not willingly be listened to, since peace offered by Germany would put the Finns under an obligation to Germany. The Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs had undertaken to keep the French and ourselves informed if any proposals were made.

On the other hand,

- (a) Present information tended to show that the Finnish military resistance would not crack, especially as there were reports that the Swedes might send further assistance in the shape of volunteers.

- (b) A communication to Marshal Mannerheim of our intentions might prejudice secrecy. In this connection, it was pointed out that secrecy would in any case be very hard to maintain, as could be judged from a report received by the Secretary of State for War that M. Reynaud and M. Leger had told the whole Allied plan to a British Member of Parliament (not a member of the Government) who had passed through Paris.
- (c) If Marshal Mannerheim knew of our intentions, there was a risk that, if the Finns were hard pressed, he might make a premature appeal. The Germans had their troops ready, and might well attack Sweden before we could intervene.

It was suggested as an alternative that Brigadier Ling might go to Finland, and afford moral support to Marshal Mannerheim as a friend, and talk to him in terms of volunteers. He could explain to the Marshal how difficult it was to get the Swedes to allow substantial numbers to pass through their territory, and might urge him to bring all possible pressure to bear on the Swedes. At the same time, he could act as a link with Finland, and furnish accurate reports of the happenings there.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR said that he would like to give the matter further consideration, and hear the views of Brigadier Ling himself before a decision was taken.

THE MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO thought there was one important aspect of our plans for intervention which had not been fully examined. This was the programme for subsequent reinforcement after the first three divisions had been landed in Scandinavia. When we informed Norway and Sweden of our proposed plan, it was almost certain that they would ask what further forces we were prepared to send.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY assumed that we would move any reinforcements as necessary to counter the strength of the forces employed by Germany.

THE CHIEF OF THE IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF said that General Gamelin had remarked to him, in conversation, that if there was no attack on the Western Front by April, the Allies must look for other theatres of operation. General Gamelin clearly envisaged the possibility of taking divisions away from France in certain circumstances.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY thought that the moral to be drawn was the urgency of pressing on with our preparations as fast as possible, and he asked whether the War Cabinet could be provided with a timetable. It would be of special interest to see how soon the leading elements of our forces would be ready to move.

THE CHIEF OF THE IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF emphasised the dangers of a gap between the movement of the first units and the next supporting body.

THE CHIEF OF NAVAL STAFF informed the War Cabinet that the Chiefs of Staff had arranged to meet on Thursday each week, to review the progress of the detailed plans and preparations. He suggested that a

report should be made each week to the War Cabinet.

THE MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO thought that the Norwegians would be very anxious about the safety of Oslo, as a result of German threats to bomb their capital the moment the Allies attempted to set foot in Norway. He suggested that the possibility of our taking steps to increase the security of Oslo might be examined.

THE PRIME MINISTER agreed.

The War Cabinet:-

- (i) Agreed that it was undesirable that Brigadier Ling should be authorised to convey an indication of His Majesty's Government's intentions to Field-Marshal Mannerheim; and in these circumstances invited the Secretary of State for War to reconsider whether Brigadier Ling should return to Finland forthwith as arranged. (This supersedes Conclusion (iii) to W.M. (40) 35th Conclusions, Minute 1, Confidential Annex.)
- (ii) Requested the Chiefs of Staff -
 - (a) To report each week, on Friday, the progress made in the preparations for the Scandinavian expedition.
 - (b) To examine whether there were any steps which could be taken to provide protection to Oslo against air attack.

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